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ABSTRACT

Abraham Maslow, in delineating the hierarchy of human needs and affirming the transcendent nature of man, drew some educational implications of the humanistic psychologies. He stated, "We speak then of a self, a kind of intrinsic nature which is very subtle, which is not conscious, which has to be sought for, and which has to be uncovered and then built upon, actualized, taught, educated. The job of the teacher is to help a person find out what's already in him rather than to reinforce him or shape or teach him into a prearranged form...." A discussion is presented on the possibility of using this view of human potential as a basis for teacher education. Components of teacher education curricula that would develop a teacher's sensitivity to children's openness to "peak experiences" of self actualization are considered. (JD)

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MASLOW'S CONCEPT OF PEAK EXPERIENCE EDUCATION:

IMPOSSIBLE MYTH OR POSSIBLE MISSION?

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All of us reading this relate in some manner to the educational process which impacts upon the person wishing to become a teacher. Teaching itself is a serious endeavor, but teaching teachers to teach is of frightening importance. Margurjer once said, "If we take ourselves too seriously, we jeopardize our sanity. If we don't take ourselves seriously enough, we jeopardize our mission". I'm more concerned today about our mission than about our often discussed sanity.

I have chosen a very familiar person's work to illuminate; one whose writings are well known and highly respected. His efforts in behalf of humanistic psychology and the resultant need theory, are in the repertoire of virtually all teachers. However, one concept postulated by Abraham Maslow has been insufficiently examined - the concept of peak experiences in education.

Maslow was not an educator in the true sense of the word - rather he was a psychologist.

Maslow, writing in the 1930's, had two distinct psychological camps to choose from. The dominant fields of personality theory were Freudianism and behaviorism. Maslow's contemporaries were aligned in one camp or the other. Maslow actually ended up rejecting both stances. In a conversation with Maslow, Mary Hall related his thoughts, "I wanted to prove that human beings are capable of something grander than war, and prejudice and hatred. I wanted to make science consider all the problems that non-scientists have been handling - religion, poetry, values, philosophy, art".¹

¹Mary Hall, "A Conversation with Abraham H. Maslow", Psychology Today, July, 1968.

Maslow felt that these two positions, freudianism and behaviorism, should be integrated into the "whole" truth.² The result was the third force psychology. Maslow postulated,

"There is now emerging over the horizon a new conception of human sickness and of human health, a psychology that I find so thrilling and so full of wonderful possibilities that I yield to the temptation to present it publicly even before it is checked and confirmed, and before it can be called reliable scientific knowledge."³

Maslow defines a need as "...namely that its absence produces illness."⁴ He enlarged this definition as he described a basic need as a characteristic which:

1. absence breeds illness
2. presence prevents illness
3. restoration cures illness
4. unmet state leads the deprived person to attempt to meet it over other satisfactions.⁵

Other principles involved in his unique need theory include:

1. The human being is motivated by a number of basic needs which are species-wide, apparently unchanging and genetic or instinctual in origin.
2. Needs are the true inner nature of the human species, but they are weak, easily distorted, and overcome by incorrect learning, habit, or tradition.⁶

²Frank Goble, The Third Force, (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1970), p. 13.

³Abraham Maslow, Toward A Psychology of Being, (New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1962), p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 21.

⁵Ibid., p. 22.

⁶Goble, p. 37.

3. The higher need is a later phyletic or evolutionary development.
4. Higher needs are later ontogenetic developments.
5. The higher the need the less imperative it is for sheer survival, the longer the gratification can be postponed, and the easier it is for the need to disappear permanently.
6. Living at the higher need level means greater biological efficiency, greater longevity, less disease, better sleep, appetite, etc.
7. Higher needs are less urgent subjectively.
8. Higher need gratifications produce more desirable subjective results, i.e., more profound happiness, serenity, and richness of the inner life.
9. Pursuit and gratification of higher needs represent a general healthward trend, a trend away from psychopathology.
10. The higher need has more preconditions.
11. Higher needs require better outside conditions to make them possible.
12. A greater value is usually placed upon the higher need than upon the lower by those who have been gratified in both.
13. The lower needs are far more tangible, more localized and more limited than are the higher needs.⁷
14. The inner nature⁸ (need structure) of man is good or neutral rather than bad.
15. The needs exist in a hierarchy.

Maslow's description of the seven basic categories of needs are found in detail in his original writings. These categories represent Maslow's basic need theory but later, as the result of further research,

⁷Abraham Maslow, Motivation and Personality, (New York: Harper and Row: 1954), p. 148-150.

⁸Maslow, Toward A Psychology of Being, p. 4.

he added a concept of growth needs or what he called Being-values or B-values. These needs are higher needs and are active as meta-motivators.

These values are:⁹

1. Wholeness
2. Perfection
3. Completion
4. Justice
5. Aliveness
6. Richness
7. Simplicity
8. Beauty
9. Goodness
10. Uniqueness
11. Effortlessness
12. Playfulness
13. Truth, Honesty
14. Self-Sufficiency

Maslow's later research continued to reflect his firm belief in the transcendent nature of man, and while his mission was not defined in terms of education he eventually was persuaded to draw some educational implications of the humanistic psychologies. Maslow stated,

"We speak then of a self, a kind of intrinsic nature which is very subtle, which is not conscious, which has to be sought for, and which has to be uncovered and then built upon, actualized, taught, educated. The

⁹Goble, p. 46.

job of the (teacher) is to help a person find out what's already in him rather than to reinforce him or shape or teach him into a prearranged form, which someone else has decided upon in advance, a priori."¹⁰

Maslow has described two types of learning (and therefore two types of teaching) extrinsic learning and intrinsic learning. The extrinsic learning is the predominant type in our educational system. It focuses upon the "impersonal or arbitrary associations". The teacher decides what is important to learn and any pay off the student hopes to get will have to reflect this. As Maslow puts it, "In this sense the learning is extrinsic to the learner, extrinsic to the personality, and is extrinsic also in the sense of collecting associations, conditionings, habits, or modes of action".¹¹ The obvious question becomes one of whether anything can actually be taught or learned if the process remains a passive one for the student. Maslow went on to say,

"This kind of learning too easily reflects the goals of the teacher and ignores the values and ends of the learner himself. It is also fair, therefore, to call such learning amoral."¹²

The second type of learning is a rarer type, seldom to be seen or practiced in our modern classrooms. This type of learning explores the intrinsic selves, uncovers basic identities, values and learnings. It involves people in truth making. The experiences include those in which we learn who we are, what we value, what we are committed to.

¹⁰Abraham Maslow, "Some Educational Implications of the Humanistic Psychologues", Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 38, #4, Fall 1968, p. 688.

¹¹Ibid., p. 691.

¹²Ibid., p. 691.

As teacher educators, we must be involved in helping the teacher examine the differences between these two types of learning and somehow become instrumental in helping them make the gigantic "leap of faith" out of "reality" into "realness".

The key to this end, lies in the concept of peak-experience education. Dennis and Powers in writing about consummatory (peak) experiences state that Maslow saw peak experiences, "basically as moments of intense joy and insight. Such experiences are characterized by a temporary loss of a sense of time, space, and self awareness. Once it is over, a person has the conviction that something valuable and important has happened."¹³

The peak experience is a very unique happening. The following are distinguishing features of peak experiences.

1. The universe is perceived as all of one piece, and the individual feels he belongs in it - everything seems to "hang together".
2. These moments are characterized by a particular kind of cognition which Maslow calls "Being cognition" (B-cognition). The person, in a sense, surrenders and submits himself to the experience. An example Maslow offers of this type is that of a mother giving her undivided attention in loving ecstasy to her newborn infant. By repeated examination the mother becomes conscious of the richness of every detail in regard to her child in a many-sided awareness.
3. Perception in the peak experience is childlike in that the experience continues to be as fresh and as beautiful as if it were the very first time.
4. The experience is felt as a self-validating moment which carries its own intrinsic values with it. The person, for example, may consider it so valuable as to make life worthwhile by its occasional occurrence.

¹³Lawrence Dennis and Francis Powers, "Dewey, Maslow and Consummatory Experience", J. Aesthetic Education, 8: October, 1974 p. 59.

5. An absence of projecting human purposes on the object of perception further characterizes such experiences. The experience is welcomed as an end in itself rather than a means experience. The state brought on, therefore, by such a happening is so delightful that the individual is not concerned about whether it leads to anything further or not.
6. A person undergoing the experience feels an unusual sense of timelessness and spacelessness. Reality is thus perceived, "Under the aspect of eternity." The individual, for instance, can feel a day passing as if it were only a few minutes.
7. The whole of reality in such moments is perceived as only good and desirable, with never an element of evil or pain. The person at the peak may be described as godlike in contemplating the whole of being and in seeing evil as a product of limited or selfish vision and understanding.
8. Conflicts and inconsistencies are resolved in the experience. The person himself becomes more integrated by a momentary loss of fear, anxiety, defense, and control. He becomes more his real self and feels that he is the creative center of his own universe.
9. Through continued peak experiences, the individual becomes progressively more loving, honest, and motivated.¹⁴

Maslow describes peak experiences as,

"An episode, or a spurt in which the powers of the person come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way, and in which he is more integrated and less split, more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego-transcending, more independent of his lower needs, etc. He becomes in these episodes more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being, more fully human".¹⁵

¹⁴Dennis and Powers, p. 59.

¹⁵Abraham Maslow, Toward A Psychology Of Being. 2nd Edition. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1968), p. 97.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The implications of peak experiences and their relationship to education are outlined as follows:

- o Peak experiences are integral to a humanistic theory of teaching.
- o Peak experiences can bring newness, excitement and enthusiasm to our classrooms.
- o Peak experiences theory should be taught to student teachers.
- o Time should be devoted in our education curricula for the purpose of discussing the ways to encourage the occurrences of peak experiences.

Maslow stated,

"Using peak experiences as an intrinsic reward or goal at many points in education is a very real possibility, and congruent with the whole philosophy of the humanistic educator. At the very least, this new knowledge can help wean teachers away from their frequent uneasiness with, and even disapproval and persecution of these experiences. If they learn to value them as great moments in the learning process, moments in which both cognitive and personal growth take place simultaneously, then this value can be transmitted to the (student). He in turn is then taught to value rather than to suppress his greatest moments in illumination, moments which can validate and make worthwhile the more usual trudging and slogging and "working through" of education.¹⁶

Obviously, the aesthetic peak experience can't be summoned or forced to occur, rather the educational arena should be open to its occurrence and recognize the situation when it arises and most importantly, allow it to happen.

¹⁶Maslow, Harvard Educational Review, p. 694.

Orr and Miller have lamented about the emergent class of intellectuals who have learned to think without assent, who have become morally paralyzed knowing all the options, being able to explain the logic of each, and of understanding that the outcome depends on one's starting point.¹⁷ Thinking without assent actually refers to thinking without drawing any implications of what the idea represents, no good or bad, moral or immoral, right or wrong. These authors feel that thinking without assent is a moral pathology and that higher education's mission should speak to a reversal of this trend. Peak experiences are the highest, purest form of assent. The peak experience is the antithesis of this moral paralysis.

Writing in 1941, Sorokin observed that, "when a sensate society with it's cult of experience and it's exultation of cynicism enters the final period, the agents of change are the true believers who turn against jadedness and sophistication and who find a belief-filled place to stand. These change agents will be responsible for idealistic eras that will renew cultural energies".¹⁸

Returning to a belief-filled place to stand requires an acknowledgment of the fully human responses to situations. These brief and valuable moments are peak-experiences.

Maslow writes, "esthetic perceiving and creating and esthetic peak-experiences are seen to be a central aspect of human life and of psychology and education rather than a peripheral one."¹⁹

¹⁷Donald E. Miller and John B. Orr, "Beyond The Relativism Myth", Change, (October, 1980), p. 11.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁹Maslow, Toward A Psychology of Being, p. 210.

"We must learn to treasure the 'jags' of the child in school, his fascinations, absorptions, his persistent wide-eyed wonderings, his Dionysian enthusiasms. At the very least, we can value his more diluted raptures, his 'interests' and hobbies. They can lead to hard work, persistent, absorbed, fruitful, educative. And conversely, I think it is possible to think of the peak-experience, the experience of awe, mystery or of perfect completion, as the goal and reward of learning as well, its end as well as its beginning. If this is true for the great historians, mathematicians, scientists, musicians, philosophers, and all of the rest, why should we not try to maximize these studies as sources of peak-experiences for the child as well?"²⁰

CURRICULUM COMPONENTS

Teacher education curricula needs to have components included which will help in developing this concept.

- o Education method courses should include a segment on peak experience theory. This would involve a review of Maslow's and other key authors writings on peak experiences.
- o In-class discussion and group work would focus next upon the identification and analysis of the student teachers' own peak experiences. Specifically, the following method is proposed:
 1. Have each student teacher write down on paper a brief description of examples of peak experiences they have had. Include the feelings that were felt during the peak experiences.
 2. Place these examples as given on a flip chart or overhead projector. List as many as the group wants to share.

²⁰Maslow, "Some Educational Implications", Harvard Educational Review, p. 694.

3. Next list the attributes that these experiences had in common. (For instance, the situations all "involved someone else", "weren't planned", "shared a sense of timelessness") Place these similarities on a flip chart also.
 4. Next ask the group to point out which of these attributes would or would not be valid for a classroom. (Experience has been that all of the attributes could be valid and appropriate for a classroom).
 5. Ask the group to discuss how teachers could create opportunities or environments for these peak experiences to occur.
- o Key elements of an environment conducive to the occurrence of peak experiences can be identified. Examples of these key elements are:
1. Being aware of peak-experiences when they are happening.
 2. Be flexible in the classroom.
 3. Allow for interactive communication.
 4. Change the classroom environment to a discovery mode".
 5. Have a planned period of interaction which has no defined behavioral objectives.
 6. Act as a role model which reacts with enthusiasm and insight.
 7. Be creative and encourage creatively.
 8. Allow for errors. People need an environment free from fear of making mistakes.
 9. Create a teaching environment which responds wholistically to the student. Relate to all needs of the learner.

Peak experiences are an important part of our lives. They give substance and direction to the necessary, more plodding, part of daily living. These experiences are elusive and infrequent but as teachers we must be aware of them as personal and professional motivators. Our

teacher education curricula would be missing an important element without including a focus upon peak experiences.

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